



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

February 27, 2004

Mr. Steve Aragón  
General Counsel  
Health and Human Services Commission  
P.O. Box 13247  
Austin, Texas 78711

OR2004-1464

Dear Mr. Aragón:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 196911.

The Health and Human Services Commission (the "commission") received a request for a list of Medicaid identification numbers for all Texas physicians. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.136 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

You assert that the requested information is confidential under section 552.136 of the Government Code, which provides:

(a) In this section, "access device" means a card, plate, code, account number, personal identification number, electronic serial number, mobile identification number, or other telecommunications service, equipment, or instrument identifier or means of account access that alone or in conjunction with another access device may be used to:

(1) obtain money, goods, services, or another thing of value;  
or

(2) initiate a transfer of funds other than a transfer originated solely by paper instrument.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a credit card, debit card, charge card, or access device number that is collected, assembled, or maintained by or for a governmental body is confidential.

Gov't Code § 552.136. You explain that requested identification numbers are the numbers assigned to a provider who has been accepted into the Medicaid program. You further explain that these numbers are assigned for identification and billing purposes and, as such, they "may be used to obtain money from the Medicaid program or to initiate the transfer of funds from the program." Based on these representations, we conclude that the marked Medicaid provider numbers in the submitted information may be used to obtain money and therefore must be withheld under section 552.136.

You ask this office to issue a previous determination authorizing the commission to withhold Medicaid provider numbers if requested in the future. We decline to issue such a previous determination at this time. *See* Open Records Decision No. 673 (2001). Therefore, this letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us. This ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Amy D. Peterson  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

ADP/sdk

Ref: ID# 196911

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Mary Magruder  
Walmart Pharmacy  
6410 IH 45  
La Marque, Texas 77568  
(w/o enclosures)